

Christian Scholarship: Need

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Lecture Notes

Justin Martyr first half of second century

Clement of Alexandria 2nd half of second century

the logos idea

the additive theory of faith and reason, of Christ and Culture

the *Civitas Dei* and the *Civitas Mundi*: The former is dedicated, in principle, to God and to his will and to his glory; but the latter is dedicated to something wholly different. Augustine; *De Civitas Dei*.

Accordingly, two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self. The former, in a word, glories in itself, the latter in the Lord. For the one seeks glory from men; but the greatest glory of the other is God, the witness of conscience. The one lifts up its head in its own glory; the other says to its God, "Thou art my glory, and the lifter up of mine head" (Ps. iii). In the one, the princes and the nations it subdues are ruled by the love of ruling; in the other, the princes and the subjects serve one another in love, the latter obeying, while the former takes thought for all. The one delights in its own strength, represented in the persons of its ruler; the other says to its God, "I will love Thee, O Lord, my strength: (Ps. xviii 1). And therefore the wise men of the one city, living according to man, have sought for profit to their own bodies or souls, or both, and those who have known God "glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened; professing themselves to be wise"--that is, glorying in their own wisdom and being possessed by pride--"they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things." For they were either leaders or followers of the people in adoring images, "and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever" (Rom. i.21-25). But in the other city there is no human wisdom, but only godliness, which offers due worship to the true God, and looks for its reward in the society of the saints, of holy angels, as well as holy men, "that God may be all in all (I Cor. xv 28). *City of God*, Book 14, 28

reasonably complete and full orb'd scholarship and science--not just philosophy--inevitably in the service of one city or the other.

Abraham Kuyper (*Stone Lectures, Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology*)

Augustine (and Kuyper) are right: the contemporary western intellectual world: a three way contest.

A. Perennial Naturalism

goes back to the ancient world (Epicurus, Democritus, Lucretius); among our contemporaries and near contemporaries there are Bertrand Russell, John Dewey, Willard van Orman Quine, Wilfrid Sellars, Dan Dennett, Richard Dawkins, the late Carl Sagan, many who look to science for salvation, a surprising number of liberal theologians, and a host of others in and out of academia. From this perspective, there is no God and human beings are properly seen as parts of nature. The way to understand what is most distinctive about us, our ability to love, to act, to think, to think *about* things, to hold beliefs, to use language, our humor and playacting, our art, philosophy, literature, history, our morality, our religion, our tendency to enlist in sometimes unlikely causes and devote our lives to them--the fundamental way to understand all this is in terms of our community with (nonhuman) nature. We are best seen as parts of nature and are to be understood in terms of our place in the natural world.

in our own day, broadly evolutionary: understand the above phenomena by way of their origin in random genetic mutation or some other source of variability, and their perpetuation by natural selection. sociobiological explanations of love: the basic idea is that love arose, ultimately and originally, by way of some source of variability such as random genetic mutation; it persisted *via* natural selection because it has or had survival value. Male and female human beings, like male and female hippopotami, get together to have children (colts) and stay together to raise them; this has survival value. And once we see that point....the same goes for these other varieties and manifestations of love. And that, fundamentally, is what there is to say about love.

Gordon Kaufman (Harvard theologian): God is "the historical evolutionary force that has brought us all into being."

Perennial naturalism constantly influences and clearly corrupts Christian thinking: can lead us, for example, to think of love in that way rather than in terms of our relationship to God.

B. Creative Anti-Realism

the fundamental idea--in sharp contrast to Naturalism--is that we human beings, in some deep and important way, are ourselves responsible for the structure and nature of the world; it is *we*, fundamentally, who are the architects of the universe. ancient world (Protagoras): Man is the measure of all things....Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and the categories of space and time, object and property, truth and falsehood, possibility and necessity, existence and nonexistence. According to this view the world of trees and planets and dinosaurs and stars--receives its basic structure from the

constituting activity of mind. So if not for our activity (if the things of experience couldn't exist without...) wouldn't be any of the things of experience. fundamental *thrust* of Kant's self-styled Copernican Revolution is that the things in the world owe their basic structure and perhaps their very existence to the noetic activity of our minds. Or perhaps I should say not minds but *mind*; for whether, on Kant's view, there is just one transcendental ego or several is, of course, a vexed question. Indeed, this question is more than vexed; given Kant's view that quantity, number, is a human category imposed on the world, there is presumably no number *n*. finite or infinite, such that the answer to the question "How many of those transcendental egos are there?" is *n*.

successors in contemporary world: we create the world by our activity: linguistic: various forms of Wittgensteinianism, existentialism, the anti-realism of Putnam and Goodman, some of European hermeneutics, Foucault, Derrida, Rorty, much contemporary literary theory (the text is all there is: there is no world for it to conform to).

C. Relativism

We construct the world: but then it looks as if we construct different worlds. Jerry Falwell, Richard Rorty, Carl Sagan or Richard Dawkins, the thought that there simply *isn't* any such thing as *the* way the world is, no such thing as objective truth, or a way the world is that is the same for all of us. Rather, there is my version of reality, the way I've somehow structured things, and your version, and many other versions: and what is true in one version need not be true in another. As Marlowe's Dr. Faustus says, "Man is the measure of all things; I am a man; therefore I am the measure of all things." No such thing as truth: only true for me, and true for you (used to think that a sophomoric confusion: but in fact....) Rorty: "what my peers will let me get away with saying" relativism. So anti-realism spawns relativism. relativism most popular contemporary form--students entering college.

anti-commitment: To 'see' this point, however, is, in a way, to see through any sort of *commitment* with respect to one's intellectual life. Commitment goes with the idea that there really *is* such a thing as truth; to be committed to something is to hold that it is true, not just in some version, but *simpliciter* or absolutely. first Kant, then all our own truths. Commitment goes with the idea that there really *is* such a thing as truth; to be committed to something is to hold that it is true, not just in some version, but *simpliciter* or absolutely. The only path of wisdom is that of the roaming, free floating intellectual who has seen through the pretensions or naïveté of those who do make serious intellectual and moral commitments. (Indeed, you may go still further. According to Richard Rorty, those who think there is such a thing, in the words of the Westminster Confession, as a "chief end of man" must be considered not just naive but *insane*--in which case, presumably, they ought not be allowed to vote or take full part in the new liberal society, and perhaps should be confined to its Gulags pending 'recovery' from the seizure.

So three major perspectives, three wholly different and deeply opposed perspectives: Christian theism, perennial naturalism, and creative anti-realism with its progeny of relativism and anti-commitment.

both perennial naturalism and creative anti-Realism (with its progeny of relativism and anti-commitment) find contemporary expression in allegedly Christian theology.

Theologian Don Cupitt "The consequence of all this is that divine and human creativity come to be seen as coinciding in the present moment. The creation of the world happens all of the time, in and through us, as language surges up within us and pours out of us to form and reform the world of experience. Reality. . .is effected by language. . ." This is said to be a "a philosophy of religion for the future" and "a genuine alternative to pietism and fundamentalism."

This is new and with-it, all right, but it also preposterous. It is about as sensible as trying to palm off, say, the Westminster Confession or Apostle's Creed and the newest and most with-it way of being an atheist.

these ways of thinking are not just *alternatives* to Christianity; they run profoundly *counter* to it.

D. Are Science and Scholarship Neutral?

the world of scholarship is intimately involved in the battle between these opposing views.

Some examples:

(1) Creative anti-realism and relativism with respect to truth; in philosophy, literary studies, law, elsewhere. Richard Rorty's notion that truth is what my peers will let me get away with saying.

(2) Structuralism, post-structuralism and deconstructionism in literary studies.

Roland Barthes:

Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing. . .In precisely this way literature (it would be better from now on to say *writing*) by refusing to assign a secret, an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text) liberates what may be called an antitheological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases--reason, science, law.

(3) Evolution

Many (Simpson, Gould, Speith, Ayala) declare it to be absolutely certain, as certain as that the earth goes around the sun. Richard Dawkins (book review *NY Times*): "It is absolutely safe to say that if you meet someone who claims not to believe in evolution,

that person is ignorant, stupid or insane (wicked, but I'd rather not consider that)." Dan Dennett (*Darwin's Dangerous Idea*): if you have doubts about evolution, you are culpably ignorant.

From a naturalistic perspective evolution is the only game in town. It is the only available answer to the questions "How did it all happen? How did all of these forms of life get here? Where did this vast profusion of life come from? And what accounts for the apparent design (Hume's "nice adjustment of means to ends") to be found throughout all of living nature?" so its probability with respect to naturalism and the evidence is much higher than its probability with respect to theism and the evidence. Richard Dawkins:

All appearances to the contrary, the only watchmaker in nature is the blind forces of physics, albeit deployed in a very special way. A true watchmaker has foresight: he designs his cogs and springs, and plans their interconnections, with a future purpose in his mind's eye. Natural selection, the blind, unconscious automatic process which Darwin discovered, and which we now know is the explanation for the existence and apparently purposeful form of all life, has no purpose in mind. It has no mind and no mind's eye. It does not plan for the future. It has no vision, no foresight, no sight at all. If it can be said to play the role of watchmaker in nature, it is the *blind* watchmaker (5).

The point about evolution: it is a plausible effort to remove one of the major embarrassments for the atheist.

(4) Another example from the same area with a different twist: Futuyma, Gould, Simpson, Dawkins, Provine and others: evolution shows that human beings are the result of *chance* processes and hence have not been designed by God or anyone else.

Douglas Futuyma *Evolutionary Biology*, p. 3 (2nd edition 1986):

By coupling undirected, purposeless variation to the blind, uncaring process of natural selection Darwin made theological or spiritual explanations of the life processes superfluous. Together with Marx's materialistic theory of history and society and Freud's attribution of human behavior to processes over which we have little control, Darwin's theory of evolution was a crucial plank in the platform of mechanism and materialism of much of science, in short--that has since been the stage of most Western thought.

George Gaylord Simpson, *The Meaning of Evolution*, pp. 344-45 (rev. ed. 1996):

Although many details remain to be worked out, it is already evident that all the objective phenomena of the history of life can be explained by purely naturalistic or, in a proper sense of the sometimes abused word, materialistic factors. They are readily explicable in the basis of differential

reproduction in populations (the main factor in the modern conception of natural selection) and of the mainly random interplay of the known processes of heredity....Man is the result of a purposeless and natural process that did not have him in mind.

(5) Sociobiological explanations of various human traits (Sunday supplements) Herbert Simon's recent article, "A Mechanism for Social Selection and Successful Altruism." *Science* vol. 250 (December, 1990) pp. 1665 ff. (Simon won a Nobel Prize in economics, but is currently professor of computer studies and psychology at Carnegie Mellon).

why, asks Simon, do people like Mother Teresa, or the Scottish missionary Eric Liddel, or the Little Sisters of the Poor, or the Jesuit missionaries of the 17th century, or the Methodist missionaries of the 19th--why do these people do the things that they do? Why do they devote their time and energy and indeed their entire lives to the welfare of other people? Of course it isn't only the great saints of the world that display this impulse; most of us do so to one degree or another. Most of us give money to help feed and clothe people we have never met; we support missionaries in foreign countries; we try, perhaps in feckless and fumbling ways, to do what we can to help the widow and orphan.

Now how, says Simon, can we account for this kind of behavior: The *rational* way to behave, he says, is to act or try to act in such a way as to increase one's personal fitness, i.e., to act so as to increase the probability that one's genes will be widely disseminated in the next and subsequent generation, thus doing well in the evolutionary derby. ("Fitness simply means expected number of progeny" (p. 1665)).

(A paradigm of rational behavior, so conceived, was reported in the South Bend *Tribune* of December 21, 1991 (dateline Alexandria (Va)): "Cecil B. Jacobson, an infertility specialist, was accused of using his own sperm to impregnate his patients; he may have fathered as many as 75 children, a prosecutor said Friday.")

Unlike Jacobson, however, such people as Mother Teresa and Thomas Aquinas cheerfully ignore the short or long term fate of their genes; what is the explanation of this bizarre behavior?

The answer, says Simon, is two mechanisms: "docility" and "bounded rationality":

Docile persons tend to learn and believe what they perceive others in the society want them to learn and believe. Thus the content of what is learned will not be fully screened for its contribution to personal fitness (p.1666).

Because of bounded rationality, the docile individual will often be unable to distinguish socially prescribed behavior that contributes to fitness from altruistic behavior [i.e. socially prescribed behavior that does not contribute to fitness--AP]. In fact, docility will reduce the inclination to evaluate independently the contributions of behavior to fitness....By virtue of bounded rationality, the docile person cannot acquire the personally

advantageous learning that provides the increment, d , of fitness without acquiring also the altruistic behaviors that cost the decrement, c (p.1667).

The idea is that a Mother Teresa or a Billy Graham or a Thomas Aquinas displays "bounded rationality"; they are unable to distinguish socially prescribed behavior that contributes to fitness from altruistic behavior (socially prescribed behavior which does not). As a result, they fail to acquire the personally advantageous learning that provides that increment d of fitness without, sadly enough, suffering that decrement c exacted by altruistic behavior. They acquiesce unthinkingly in what society tells them is the right way to behave; and they aren't quite up to making their own independent evaluation of the likely bearing of such behavior on the fate of their genes. If they *did* make such an independent evaluation (and were rational enough to avoid silly mistakes) they would presumably see that this sort of behavior does not contribute to personal fitness, drop it like a hot potato, and get right to work on their expected number of progeny.

not even a beginning of a viable explanation; she reflected in her limited human way the magnificent splendor of Christ's sacrificial action in the Atonement. Indeed, is there anything a human being can do that is *more* rational--more in accord with reason and with our ultimate destiny and ultimate good--than what she does?

(6) 'fine-tuning' in cosmology. Starting in the late sixties and early seventies, astrophysicists and others noted that several of the basic physical constants must fall within very narrow limits if there is to be the development of intelligent life. Car and Rees:

The basic features of galaxies, stars, planets and the everyday world are essentially determined by a few microphysical constants and by the effects of gravitation....several aspects of our Universe--some which seem to be prerequisites for the evolution of any form of life--depend rather delicately on apparent 'coincidences' among the physical constants. "The Anthropic Principle and the Structure of the Physical World" (*Nature*, 1979 p. 605). force of gravity, weak and strong nuclear forces.

various inflationary scenarios: "principle of indifference": a good physical theory will not permit these cosmic coincidences (or the consequent appearance of design).

(7) Science of mind: psychology. artificial intelligence, philosophy of mind: one vast research project dedicated to giving a naturalistic account of such mental phenomena as consciousness, desire, belief, intentionality, qualia, and the like. From a theistic point of view, much of what goes on can be seen as misguided.

(8) Scripture scholarship: can't properly make any theological assumptions in working at it (Ernst Troeltsch. Van Harvey: *The Historian and the Believer* 1966; John Collins, Barnabas Lindars, many others. But this is a very different enterprise from trying to see what it is that God is teaching us in S. (3rd lecture).

(9) psychology and sociology of religion. Piaget. The question: "How can people possibly believe in supernatural beings and forces, and whatever drives them to make such irrational sacrifices in the name of faith? social scientific thinking has been dominated by this question. When it is posed in this way, social scientists have been virtually forced to frame answers that postulate personal flaws in those who believe and sacrifice. Many have offered elaborate psychopathological explanations of religious commitment. For others, the explanation of preference has been ignorance, usually defined in terms of cultural backwardness or false consciousness." p. 251, Rodney Stark and Roger Finke *The Churching of America 1776-1980*.

(10) the assumption, in most sociology, that human beings are not really free and responsible.

So one kind of need: Christian community has to be aware of these matters, in order to maintain spiritual and intellectual integrity (integrality).

A second kind of reason for need for Christian scholarship:

Jesus: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength, and with all your mind.

What is it to love the Lord with all my mind?

For further details about Alvin Plantinga's views on the need and nature of Christian scholarship and for his views on what he describes as "two or more kinds of Scripture scholarship," see his books: *The Twin Pillars of Christian Scholarship* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Calvin College and Seminary, 1990) and *Warranted Christian Belief* (forthcoming).

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